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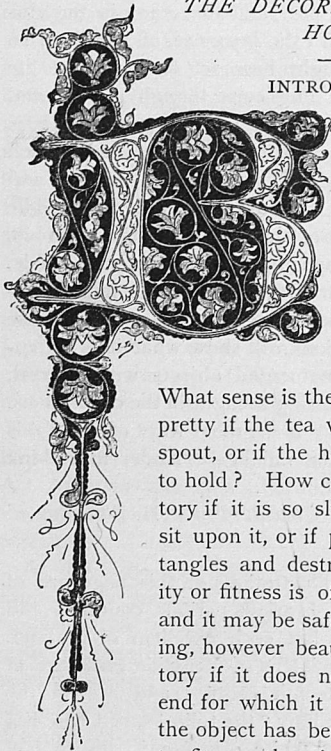
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DECORATION & FURNITURE

THE DECORATION OF OUR HOMES.

INTRODUCTION.



BEFORE we begin the study of art principles we must acknowledge to ourselves the paramount importance of utility. Whether beautiful or not, domestic objects must be useful.

What sense is there in making a teapot pretty if the tea will not pour from the spout, or if the handle is uncomfortable to hold? How can a chair be satisfactory if it is so slight that one fears to sit upon it, or if protruding carving entangles and destroys the dress? Utility or fitness is of primary importance, and it may be safely assumed that nothing, however beautiful, can be satisfactory if it does not readily answer the end for which it was made. But, after the object has been formed with a view to fitness, then it is time to see how it

can be made pleasing.

To be beautiful, an object must not only answer the end of its creation, but it must also be without coarseness or crudeness either of form or color. It must have no parts that can be removed while it is yet left equally good or better. In the case of a room, the beautiful cannot be achieved in the absence of harmony between all the articles of furniture, the wall decorations, the hangings, the carpets and whatever it may contain—harmony of form and harmony of color. All the parts must combine to form a concordant whole, and each must make the others look better. The wall-paper must help the vases, the carpet must improve the furniture, and so on; while in their turn the vases must lend beauty to the wall, and the furniture must assist the carpet. There must also be harmony of form and color between all the parts of every pattern that gives character to a fabric or any other object. Its individual forms must accord the one with the other, and its colors must blend in a concordant manner. Harmony, then, being of primary importance in the production of beautiful rooms, it must be diligently studied. The color harmony on the walls of the Alhambra at Granada differs from that of a mandarin's richly embroidered robe, but in looking at either we receive pleasure. When about to decorate a room we may choose any class of harmony which appears to us most appropriate, and, speaking of pleasant combinations of color only, we may have those which are cool, or those which are warm; those which are rich, or those which are soft; those which are strong, or those which are sombre; but harmony there must be if there is to be beauty.

Harmonies of color abound in the good native work of India, China, Japan and Persia. Indian carpets are worthy of the most careful consideration, especially those made more than twenty years ago, and so are those of Persia and Morocco. The shawls and dress fabrics from India and Persia, the embroideries and enamels from China, and the enamels and better embroideries from Japan, must also be studied. Indeed, almost all that we receive from these four countries is excellent and deserves close attention.

To learn the proper combination of objects in a room, access to rooms known to be furnished with good taste should be secured, and these should be carefully considered till we perceive how particular effects are attained. In this way we may learn to recognize color harmonies and harmonious general effects, and ultimately to produce them in our own houses.

To master harmony of form it is needful to know something of the nature of curves. The hyperbolic is more beautiful than the parabolic curve, and the catenary (or

chain) curve is in some cases very pleasant. It is not necessary to study mathematics in order to familiarize ourselves with these, for cones can be bought with the two former classes of curves drawn on them, and the catenary curve is seen wherever a chain is suspended with the ends fixed at a distance from each other. Chains are often attached to gas fixtures as mere ornaments because of the beauty of their curves.

For general purposes it may be sufficient to know that a curve is more beautiful as it is more difficult to detect its origin. Thus, a curve struck from one centre, as the bounding line of a circle, is less beautiful than a curve struck from two, as the curve of the ellipse; and this in its turn is less beautiful than one struck from three centres, as the egg-shape, and so on; as it becomes more subtle in character it is more beautiful. Something of the same kind is true in relation to proportion, and it is very desirable to know the law which governs the division of spaces into pleasantly proportioned parts. If we wished to put a dado around a wall we should not, without this knowledge, know to what height it could advantageously reach, and the same difficulty would arise had we to arrange panels with due relation to the width of the stiles surrounding them. The law is simply this: The more difficult it is to detect the relation which one part bears to another the more beautiful the proportion is. Thus, a dado half the height of the wall would not be beautiful, for the proportion could be immediately determined by the eye. The relation of one third to two thirds is better, but this would be only commonplace; that of two to five is better still, and that of five to thirteen yet more beautiful, for it is more subtle. If, then, a wall is thirteen feet high the dado may be five feet, or it may be eight feet, for either would look well. A still more subtle proportion than this would be even better.

The beautiful carpets of Persia and India are made with borders as part of the whole, and these will be found to bear subtle relations, as regards width, to the centres which they frame. This is very different from our method of selling carpeting by the strip and having loose borders of fixed widths to surround, indifferently, a large centre or a small one.

Before proceeding to consider more specifically the artistic furnishing of our homes, I should like to give a few extracts from writers whose views, on such matters, deserve attention. Professor George Wilson says: "It is astonishing how many people think a thing cannot be beautiful if it is cheap, or comfortable if it is beautiful." "Many have found it difficult to realize that a porridge-bowl is as willing to be made graceful as a wine-cup." "The touch of genius can confer beauty upon the meanest things." "A nation should recognize the obligation to invest all its public acts to the utmost extent that it wisely can, with an atmosphere of beauty, and to bring a sense of the graceful home to every man's house and bosom."

R. W. Edis says: "In decoration and furniture the great aim of the designer should be simplicity and appropriateness of form and design, with harmony of color, to show that the cheapest and commonest things need not be ugly, that truth in art and design, in fact, need not of necessity involve costliness and lavish expenditure." "Fitness and absolute truth are essential to all real art, and it should never be forgotten that design is not the offspring of idle fancy; it is the studied result of cumulative observation and delightful habit." "We may make our homes and habitations, if not absolutely shrines of beauty and good taste, at least pleasant places, where the educated eye may look around without being shocked and offended by gross vulgarity and gaudy unpleasantness."

Vitruvius says: "The perfection of all works depends on their fitness to answer the end proposed, and on principles resulting from a consideration of nature herself; and the ancients approved only those which, by strict analogy, were borne out by appearance of utility."

Professor Richmond says: "Every article of daily life, down to the very smallest detail, might be beautiful, nay, should be so." "If our country is ever to become

an artistic country in the sense in which Greece was, it will be mainly through the influence of good art brought face to face in daily and hourly contact with the people in common objects. Their taste must be either elevated or lowered by their immediate surroundings, and grow unconsciously in accord with them."

A. W. Pugin says: "The useful is a vehicle for the beautiful." "How many objects of ordinary use are rendered monstrous and ridiculous simply because the artist, instead of seeking the most convenient form, and then decorating it, has embodied some extravagance to conceal the real purpose for which the article was made."

Professor Fergusson says: "All common and useful things may be refined into objects of beauty, and though common, all that is beautiful or high in art is merely an elaboration and refinement of what is fundamentally a useful and a necessary art."

Sir M. Digby Wyatt says: "By means of design we inscribe, or ought to inscribe, upon every object of which we determine the form, all essential particulars concerning its material, its method of construction, and its use."

T. Gambier Parry says: "The noblest ambition of an artist is not his own distinction. His work is to contribute to human happiness, and his best work is that which does so by the power of a pure and noble motive, which animates his art because it animates himself."

Owen Jones says: "As architecture, so all works of the decorative arts, should possess fitness, proportion, harmony—the result of all which is repose." "Construction should be decorated; decoration should never be purposely constructed." "That which is beautiful is true; that which is true must be beautiful." "Flowers or other natural objects should not be used as ornament, but conventional representations founded upon them sufficiently suggestive to convey the intended image to the mind, without destroying the unity of the object they are employed to decorate."

These extracts show how various authorities have insisted on the same thing. We have here agreement in urging that all things should be useful: that being useful they must be beautiful; that the art greatness of a nation is dependent on the meaner objects being beautiful, and that truthfulness is an essential pre-requisite to all artistic effects produced in our homes.

Truthfulness in relation to art is of the greatest importance; for what is false is calculated to deceive, and what deceives is repellant. Speaking of truth, and of the pleasure derived from finding it anywhere, Professor Robert Hunt says: "The human mind naturally delights in the discovery of truth." "To be forever true is the science of poetry—the revelation of truth is the poetry of science."

As in poetry and in science so it is in art, for the utterance of truth is at all times pleasant. Truthfulness involves thoroughness, and thoroughness is never found in the absence of earnestness. Earnest work is lovable because it is true. The examination of little Japanese objects, intended for the maker's own use, often affords especial pleasure, because they manifest such an earnest purpose in their producers. I have a charming little pot with a rim or foot on which it stands; on the bottom of the pot (within the rim), though this is rarely seen, is a pattern wrought with the same loving care as on the exposed part. How different is this from finding a table with mahogany legs and an ill-finished pine top, a looking-glass with its stand and frame polished and its back of unplanned wood, a carpet with as many threads left out as can be spared without their being missed, a velvet with a "shoddy" back, or plastering work "done" with such bad material that it falls from the ceiling when the first "banging" of a door occurs! All this is untruthful, disappointing, and consequently inartistic.

Different materials are worked in different ways, and different appearances result from various methods of working. Glass vessels generally owe their shape to "blowing," but crystal can only be cut; hence, glass should never be "cut" all over so as altogether to resemble crystal. In such a case we are disappointed when we discover that the vessel is formed of the cheaper

material, and we feel that an attempt has been made at deceiving us. Iron objects can be formed by the metal being "cast" while in a molten condition, or by hammering when it is merely red-hot. Then why make cast iron look like that which is wrought? By both methods beautiful things may be produced, but both cast objects and wrought should look what they are.

If, then, we are to have satisfactory houses, everything we put in them must be true, and appear to be just what it is. We have seen that the meanest things may be beautiful, and that by artistic arrangement even common objects may be so combined as to form a beautiful whole; hence, it is not necessary to hide a pine table-top by a cloth and add mahogany legs to make it look well. Pine is as beautiful as mahogany, only in each case the surroundings must accord.

A matter of the greatest importance in connection with decorative art is the introduction of interest, or subject, into compositions. Ornament should not simply be that which ornaments or beautifies: it should interest as well as please. No forms should ever be applied to anything that do not render the object so invested more beautiful than it would be without them, but when so added they should also give interest by revealing some pleasant fact or embodying some welcome idea.

Many of the forms used in Eastern decorations have a religious significance, as those derived from flame among the fire worshippers, or those that owe their origin to the sacred flower on which Buddha sits. But there are other ways of giving interest to decoration. I have before me a piece of Japanese lacquer on which are drawn reeds swaying in the breeze, yet laden with dew-drops, while the crescent moon shines above. These reeds are favorite plants in Japan, like the lily-of-the-valley in England, and they grow on the banks of running streams. Hence, the design calls up, at least in the Japanese mind, the most pleasurable recollections of a stroll in the late evening's coolness after a burning day.

Another illustration of poetic thought in a pattern was

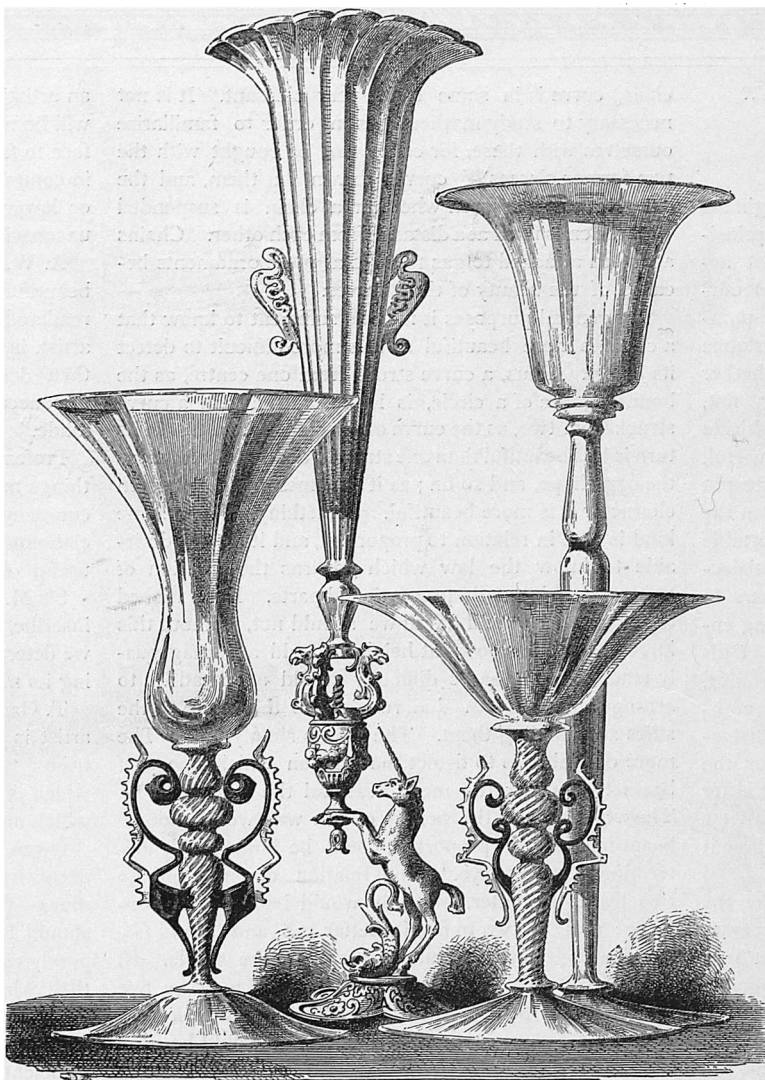
irregularly upon a cloth-of-gold ground. The flowers were not shaded, but were treated as flat ornaments, and were thus decorations of a flat surface. The butterflies

then, we have a notable instance of an ornamental object conveying pleasant thought.

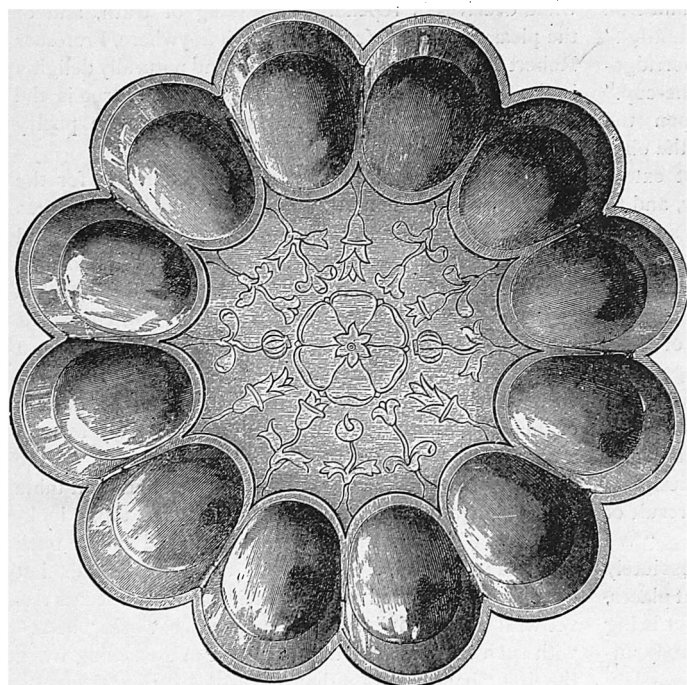
Everywhere in Japan the crane occurs. Here is a bowl on the back of which is delineated in a vigorous and artistic manner a storm at sea. The crested waves are rolling and breaking and the clouds come near to the waters. But there is more than a mere storm portrayed here, for a crane is flying past, and the crane is the emblem, with the Japanese, of long life; so the thought here set forth is, that life may be long even though storms and troubles occur. On a Japanese kettle is a dragon bathing in the element which the kettle is supposed to contain and lashing it into violent ebullition. The drawing of this scene is most vigorous, the composition is beautiful as a whole, and, moreover, it symbolizes, in a charming manner, the boiling of water. These illustrations will show what it is to endow ornamented objects with interest, by expressing thought in the decorations. There are many other ways of doing this which the intelligent reader may think out for himself.

CHRISTOPHER H. DRESSER.

THE illustrations on this page are of objects of various periods, countries and owners, but each excellent of its kind. The specimens of Venetian glass are of the sixteenth century and are in the Musée Cluny: the tulip-shaped vase has blue and white ornaments; the foot of the curious piece with the unicorn is of metal, and the cup in the foreground has the stem richly ornamented in blue and white. The egg plate is in the Hildesheim treasury. It is a good design, and we should like to see it reproduced for the American breakfast-table by such silver-smiths as the Whiting or the Gorham Company, who may also find the illustration of the old French sugar-bowl, which was in the San Donato collection, not without value in its suggestiveness.



VENETIAN GLASS.
IN THE CLUNY MUSEUM.



EGG PLATE.
IN THE HILDESHEIM TREASURY.

were also flatly treated and were intermingled harmoniously with the flowers. No one could look upon this beautiful dress without thinking of summer, for the very insects appeared to be sunning themselves, and the blossoms were radiant with light. I once saw a Chinese cloisonné bowl with three ornamental panels on its sides surrounded by scroll ornament. In one of the panels was a conventionally treated spray of the almond, in another the sacred bean, and in the third the chrysanthemum. These sprays not only formed a pleasant contrast with the purely conventional ornaments, but called up pleasurable thought in those who examined the object; for the almond is to the Chinese the flower of spring, the sacred bean that of

summer, and the chrysanthemum that of autumn. Besides this, the almond is the symbol of beauty, the bean is sacred, and the chrysanthemum is imperial. Here,

In the March number of the magazine some description was given of fine lacquer in the collection of Mr. W. T. Walters, of Baltimore. Assuming that there



SILVER SUGAR-BOWL. BY PIERRE GERMAIN.
IN THE LATE SAN DONATO COLLECTION.

seen on a Japanese state dress shown in the Vienna International Exhibition a few years since. The design consisted of many-colored flowers and butterflies ranged

are a considerable number of our readers who are not aware of the antiquity of this justly esteemed decoration, some points of information on the subject may not be

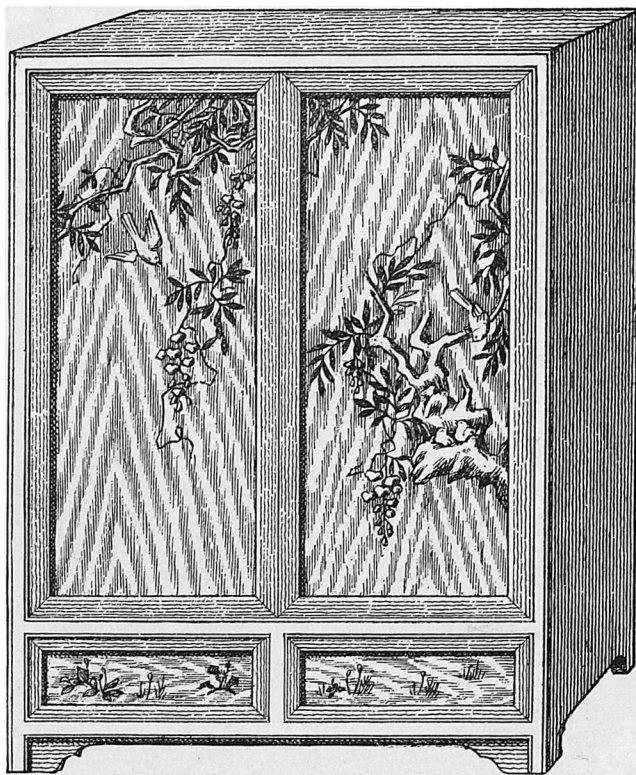
out of place. It is only within comparatively a few years that the secret of its production has been given to the world. In the oldest Japanese books there is no clue to it. The secret of the manufacture was jealously guarded and handed down from father to son. Abundant references are found in the ancient literature of Japan, however, to the use of lacquer in that country. One old work speaks of lacquered furniture already in use at the court one hundred and eighty years before the Christian era. Among the treasures in the temple of Todaiji at Naro, in the province of Yamato, are some lacquered boxes, for holding prayer-books, as old as our third century. Both red and gold lacquer are mentioned in a book called "Engishiki," published toward the end of the fourth century. Eighty years later, one reads of "Nashiji," or gold-sprinkled lacquer, and in 480, in the writings of a Japanese woman, mention is made of lacquer incrustated with mother-of-pearl. Between 910 and 1650 was the Renaissance of Japan. It was an era of almost uninterrupted peace, and the art of the lacquer-workers reached then its highest degree of perfection. Toward the close of this period flourished Ritsuwō, to whom reference was made in *The Art Amateur* last month, in connection with the splendid cabinet by him in the Walters collection.

At the Paris Exposition of 1867, a striking exhibit was made of old and new Japanese lacquer. But it showed that the art had seriously declined from the beginning of the eighteenth century, when, the port of Nagasaki having been opened to Dutch traders, their demand for the ware led to the production of it in great quantities, but of inartistic designs and of inferior workmanship. The home government, seeing this evil, set to work to correct it, and succeeded so well that to-day in the cities of Tokio, Kiyoto, and Osaka, pieces are produced scarcely less admirable than the prized "Jidai Mono" of what we have ventured to call the Japanese Renaissance period. At the Vienna Exposition, improvement was observable; it was more apparent at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia; and at the Paris Exposition of 1878 the result of the efforts of the Japanese Government to revive the dying art had reached a very marked degree of success. The two cabinets illustrated herewith were shown at the last named exhibition. Unlike the Walters cabinet referred to, they are of natural woods decorated with lacquer ornaments—not wholly covered with the varnish.

THE decoration of the house must be built up like the house itself. It must have the same relation to its purposes, and the same harmony with them. The hall must not only be painted and panelled, but it must be painted and panelled like a hall, not like a bedroom. The elaborate ornamentation of a vast drawing-room must not be applied to a little parlor, or the embellishment of the public rooms of the house to the mistress' boudoir or the master's study. The symmetrical house reflects the character of its divisions as clearly as if the name of each room were painted on a sign over the door. In such a house you could never take a bedroom for the parlor, or a parlor for a bedroom, even were they bare of furniture.

Notes on Decoration.

IN the decoration of the state apartments of the great private residences in New York City the French style of



CABINET IN NATURAL WOOD RELIEVED WITH LACQUER.

a century or more ago prevails to a greater extent than ever, and the Gotham millionaire will be satisfied with nothing less than sending to the French capital direct for designs, and sometimes, indeed, for the complete equipment of his salon. The elegance of the Louis Quatorze and Louis Seize styles is undeniable, but it calls for a lavish expenditure of money for the owner of

the furnishing of which have been given out with reckless prodigality. A New York millionaire is usually satisfied with a single room of this character, and I think that he is right; for its stilted elegance is hardly in keeping with the every-day life of the nineteenth century American. Mr. Ogden Goelet has a ball-room of the period of Louis Quatorze, and Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt has a Louis Seize music-room. Both were decorated by the famous M. Allard, of Paris, who, having sent his son here to attend to these commissions, found in this country such a profitable field that he has established him in business in Fifth Avenue, in partnership with a son of M. Prignot, a no less famous designer of Paris than M. Allard is a decorator.

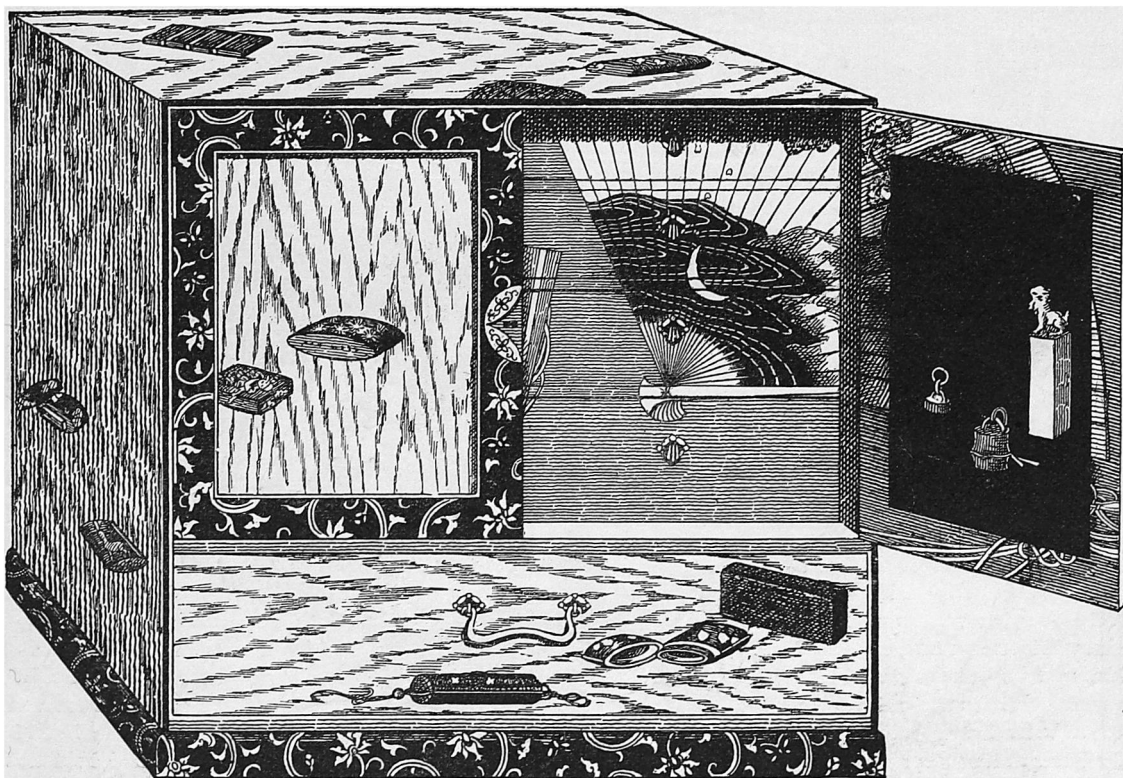
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THE ball-room of Mr. Goelet's house is a noble apartment well adapted to the elegant decoration of the time of "Le Grand Monarque." It is about 32 feet long, 26 wide, and 16 feet high. The floor is a highly polished mosaic of costly light woods; the oak wainscot walls, treated in panels richly carved, are painted in delicate tints of cream color and violet, the gilding of the raised portions showing the grain of the wood underneath. There is an elaborate cornice around the room, of painted and gilded papier-maché reproductions of sculptured cherubim and garlands, and richly gilt mouldings enframe a ceiling of a pale blue and gray sky, awaiting the advent of some French masterpiece—by Lefebvre, perhaps—of Cupids or Auroras. In narrow gilt mouldings are seven charming over-door and window pictures by Chaplin—allegorical figures of beautiful women and children. The mantel is very imposing. It is of amethyst marble, with the horizontal shaft inset with gilt bronze female figures holding garlands; the supporting columns being boldly sculptured female caryatides. Above the mantel is a great mirror, with highly ornate, carved and gilt frame, surmounted by a marble profile bust of Louis XIV. which, being on a ground of "blue turquin," is thrown out in relief with good effect.

* * *

RICHNESS of fabric, delicacy of color, and elegance of

design characterize, in a remarkable degree, the draperies and furniture coverings. The material is a silk brocade of gray tone embroidered with posies and garlands, with true Louis Quatorze profusion. Gold thread runs through the fabric, producing a charming effect when the light catches it. The odd chairs are covered with a brocade of a different tint from that used for the handsomely carved and gilded arm-chairs. There is one large console table, and in the middle of the room is a fine marquetry table. Candles are the only lights used. About two hundred and fifty are needed. No centre illumination is required, so the barbarism of running the rod of a heavy chandelier



CABINET IN NATURAL WOOD, DECORATED WITH SPECIMENS OF LACQUER OF VARIOUS PERIODS.

the mansion to have everything in keeping. To affect it without the means to sustain it would be a fearful mistake. In Paris, M. de Villeneuve has lately built himself an "hotel" in the Avenue Messina, completely in the Louis Seize fashion, and Baron Edmund de Rothschild is building in the Faubourg St. Honoré an exact reproduction of an eighteenth century mansion, commissions for

through a costly ceiling painting—to be seen in some houses—is happily avoided. Twelve candelabra, supported by female caryatides, are attached to pilasters, and on each side of the bow-window is an immense candelabrum, with elaborately carved and gilt cupids and garlands entwined about the column and stand; the candelabrum proper—which is of gilt bronze—throwing